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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 22, 2002

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MHSAA Submits Sports Seasons Plan; Proposal Adds Four Tournaments

EAST LANSING, Mich. – May 22 – Stating its belief that more students are helped and fewer are hurt by adding new tournaments than by switching existing seasons, the Michigan High School Athletic Association today submitted to a Federal District Court a plan that would change the scheduling of its tournaments in three sports and add four new tournaments for girls.

The MHSAA's tournaments for golf, swimming & diving and tennis would be affected. The MHSAA's Lower Peninsula tournament in boys golf would move to the spring, girls golf to the fall; girls swimming & diving would move to the winter, boys to the fall; and boys tennis would move to the fall and girls to the spring. In the Upper Peninsula, the MHSAA's championship for girls golf would move to the fall while boys golf would remain in the spring; boys swimming & diving would move to the fall, while girls swimming & diving would remain in the winter; and the MHSAA's U.P. championships in boys and girls tennis would reverse seasons as in the Lower Peninsula.

These changes are dependent upon the approval of the U.S. District Court in Kalamazoo later this summer; and none of the changes will occur if the MHSAA's appeal of the District Court's decision to the U.S. Court of Appeals is successful. On May 9, the Sixth Circuit of the U.S. Court of Appeals delayed until at least 2004-05 the District Court's ruling that seasons be realigned in 2003-04.

The MHSAA's plan also commits the association to starting four new post-season tournaments for girls before adding any new tournaments for boys. Two new tournaments would be initiated each year for two years, with the association choosing the four sports that serve its membership best from the following list of 12 sports: bowling, crew, equestrian, field hockey, figure skating, ice hockey, indoor track & field, lacrosse, powerlifting, synchronized swimming, water polo and wrestling.

The Compliance Plan was approved by the MHSAA Representative Council during a meeting this morning and filed with the Federal Court this afternoon. Plaintiffs have two weeks to respond to the Plan,

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after which the MHSAA has two weeks to reply. The U.S. District Court in Kalamazoo will conduct a hearing regarding the Plan on July 18.

“Schools and their students wanted no change,” said MHSAA Executive Director John E. “Jack” Roberts, “but no change is not an option for the court-ordered plan. We had to comply with the Court’s Order to place an equal number of tournaments in what the Court ruled are disadvantageous seasons and still respect the overwhelming sentiments of our membership to maximize participation by scheduling boys and girls in different seasons in basketball, Lower Peninsula golf, soccer, Lower Peninsula swimming & diving and tennis.”

The Plan leaves three girls’ sports and places three boys’ sports in the District Court-designated disadvantageous season. It puts three girls’ sports and leaves only two boys’ sports in the District Court-designated advantageous seasons.

“We have gone beyond the Court’s Order to demonstrate further the intent of this organization and its member schools to promote opportunities for girls in athletics,” said Roberts. “Decades ago, schools scheduled sports seasons for girls in order to facilitate the fastest growth possible in girls’ athletic opportunities, and their efforts have proven successful. In every one of the sports at issue in this case, Michigan’s girls high school sports participation rates are better than its eighth rank nationally in population for high school age girls.”

The MHSAA also released today the results of a survey of its membership conducted in late April regarding sports seasons.

“The response was phenomenal,” said Roberts. “In two weeks’ time, more than 86 percent of our member schools responded with properly signed survey responses. This attests to their great interest in the issue, and their concerns for the outcome.”

Basketball is the sport that schools least want moved for either gender. Basketball is also the sport that schools least want combined in the same season for boys and girls. No plan for season changes received majority support, but the option selected by the Council – addressing golf, swimming & diving and tennis – received the best response.

“The Council listened to schools as well as it could,” said Roberts. “Schools and their students really wanted no change, and there wasn’t enthusiasm for any particular option. But the Representative Council always takes its direction from the membership, and the membership has spoken.

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“The part of this Plan that excites us is the part that does not disrupt schools, coaches and student-athletes, but challenges the MHSAA office to come up with the resources to provide high quality tournaments for girls in four additional sports over two years.”

The MHSAA is a private, not-for-profit corporation of voluntary membership by over 1,300 public and private senior high schools and junior high/middle schools which exists to develop common rules for athletic eligibility and competition. No government funds or tax dollars support the MHSAA, which was the first such association nationally to not accept membership dues or tournament entry fees from schools. Member schools which enforce these rules may participate in MHSAA tournaments, which attract approximately 1.6 million spectators each year.

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